The Best Eggs

Are Eggland’s Best really the best eggs? They are definitely pricey, that’s for sure.

My quest to find out actually began one day last summer when I sent my husband to the store

for eggs. When he came home I looked at the receipt, like I always do, and my jaw dropped.

“What? $3.86 for a carton of eggs?” I asked myself. Thinking how ridiculous the price was and

my curiosity piqued, I set out to do a bit of investigating.

The first thing I did was look at the carton, I mean *really* look at the carton. Okay, as

cartons go, it was pretty eye-catching, colorful with bright labels. (no wonder my husband was

drawn to it) This was some fancy carton, loaded with written information. One of the phrases

said ‘cage-free.’ When I read that, it made me visualize pretty chickens of all colors with shiny

bright feathers roaming and feeding in a peaceful, grassy farmyard, happy as can be. That got

me wondering what ‘cage-free’ actually meant. So I decided to find out.

The most logical next step, for me, was to go online. I Googled the words‘cage-free’ and

numerous links came up. One of the pages was directly linked to Eggland’s company internet

website, where the company shared a wealth of information regarding the hens’ living conditions

and care provided them. In addition to that information, I also located useful data from a

March 6, 2012 piece in an online magazine, *Better Health News.* This article helped me learn the

difference between ‘free-range’ and ‘cage-free’.

After reading the articles I realized how uninformed I really was, as a consumer. What I

discovered was this. ‘Cage-free’ means the hens can roam around in a very large building, but

do not have outdoor access like ‘free-range’ hens. However, I also came to learn that the

designation of ‘free-range’ is actually fairly easy for egg-production facilities to obtain.

According to a quote from USDA trade guidelines, for the ‘free-range’ designation, all the

producer need do is follow these guidelines: “The birds are raised in heated and air-cooled

growing houses with access to the outdoors…” (USDA section 10.5, page 13) Just having

access to the outdoors, not any mandatory time spent outdoors, is enough to label eggs ‘free-

range’ and increase the price three times over regular eggs.

The business about ‘cage-free’ vs. ‘free-range’ got me thinking about my

Grandma Picy’s chickens. The birds roamed all over her property, leisurely pecking at the

ground eating grain, seeds, insects, whatever they wanted basically. The time to gather the eggs

got me so excited. We sisters would argue over who got to hold the basket and who actually got

to put her hand under the hen’s warm belly to gently retrieve the eggs. We usually split the

privilege 50/50 and everyone was happy, especially the hens, who I’m sure, grew tired of

witnessing the constant bickering. The eggs Grandma’s chickens laid didn’t come in a fancy

carton, didn’t hold the special designation of‘cage-free’ or ‘free-range’, didn’t cost $3.86 a

dozen, but they were the *best* in my opinion, hands down.

My research was now done. I thought about Grandma’s hens and I’ve made up

my mind. Eggland’s can stay in the store where other uninformed consumers can buy them.

I, for one, will travel down the road a couple of miles to the rustic Ozarks farm with a homemade

wooden sign in the yard stating “Eggs 4 Sell,” hand over my two, one dollar bills,and bring home

a couple dozen of the most wonderful eggs in the world. They do not have fancy packages, or

colorful labels touting their organic qualities, but in reality they *are* all that and more. My mind

is made up. No more Eggland’s Best for me!